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ABSTRACT

Teachers' diverse goals for students reflect differences in teachers' conceptions of the teaching task and students' needs. This segment of the teachers' workplace research project (fieldwork and surveys in 16 public and private secondary schools) concentrated on ways in which workplace features generated dissimilar patterns of pedagogical response. The critical finding was that teachers within the same school or department developed different responses to different students depending on the character of their collegial environment. The survey data showed that collegiality indicates more than supportive relationships among teachers; rather, it indicates a professional community with norms of innovation and learning, where teachers are enthusiastic about their work, and where focus is upon devising strategies that enable all students to prosper. Important factors in collegial professional communities are capacity for reflection, feedback, and problem solving. Frustrated teachers in the study all existed in professional communities with powerful norms of privacy. Findings suggest that the school workplace is a physical setting; a formal organization; an employer; and a social and psychological setting in which teachers construct a sense of practice, of professional efficacy, and of professional community. More than any other factor, the nature of the professional community that exists in the workplace appears critical to the character of teaching and learning for teachers and their students. (LL)

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WHAT MATTERS MOST IN TEACHERS' WORKPLACE CONTEXT?

Milbrey Wallin McLaughlin

INTRODUCTION[1]

What about the school workplace matters most to teachers? What dimensions of the school setting are most influential in shaping the ways teachers think about practice and what they do in the classroom? Questions of how to improve teaching have occupied public school reformers from the system's inception (Tyack, 1974) and, over the years, ideas about what counts to the character and quality of teaching have varied substantially (Cohen & Ball, 1990; Cohen & Spillane, 1991).

Various strands of research and the reforms they prompted have focused on numerous aspects of teachers' workplace context in efforts to identify factors that shape teachers' practice and, by extension, student outcomes. For example, the effective schools literature identified five key factors: strong instructional leadership, a clear sense of school purpose, an emphasis on basic skills, close monitoring of academic accomplishment, and an orderly school environment as workplace dimensions related to student achievement (Edmonds, 1979). Somewhat ironically, in this line of research and the policy that flows from it, administrators are framed as the decision maker of greatest consequence; teachers are cast primarily as targets of effective schools policies.

Other analysts have focused on structural and organizational aspects of the workplace as major determinants of teachers' attitudes and practices. Researchers have examined the physical, economic, organizational, and political aspects of schools in efforts to discover factors that influence what teachers do and how they think about their work. (for an analytic review, see (Johnson, 1990). Issues such as governance, class size, workload, leadership, safety, authority relations, supervisory arrangements alternatively comprise explanations of "the problem" and suggestions for policy solutions. (Corcoran, Walker & White, 1988; Louis & Miles, 1990; Shedd & Bacharach, 1991)

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[1] My thanks to Joan Talbert for her many contributions to this chapter as CRC colleague, field-work partner, and collaborator in on-going conversations about the many meanings of school workplace, to David Cohen for his thoughtful reading of an earlier version of this chapter and helpful suggestions for the next iteration, to Rebecca Perry for careful reading of the penultimate draft and useful comments, and to Juliann Cummer for managing the various data bases upon which this essay depends.

Teachers' incentives and motivation also have received attention from policymakers and reformers. In particular, the relatively low pay and status afforded teachers prompted reforms such as merit pay or career ladders as strategies to induce better performance from teachers and bolster their commitment to teaching (Bacharach, Bauer & Shedd, 1986). Better pay, or reward for top performance, these strategies assume, will stimulate teachers to work harder and more effectively.

Other reforms targeted teachers' qualifications and sought to bring more rigorous standards to teachers' credentialling and pre-service training (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1988). More dollars for and attention to in-service education, or staff development, aimed to enhance the skills of teachers at work in the nation's schools (Little, et al., 1987; McLaughlin, 1990). Teacher evaluation strategies moved to the fore as a way to monitor teachers' classroom effectiveness and identify inadequate professional performance and teaches' competencies needing improvement (see the perspectives collected in Millman & Darling-Hammond, 1990).

Yet another approach to the problem of improving teaching practices moves from teachers' attributes variously considered to focus on the "technology" of teaching, the content of curriculum and teachers' classroom practices, and on student standards. State reform efforts during the 1980s and 1990s focused on curricula guidelines, frameworks and tougher standards for students as strategies to enhance academic excellence (Clune, 1989; Clune, White & Patterson, 1989; Firestone, Furhman & Kirst, 1989). Reforms of this genre strive to bring more academic content and higher standards of achievement to America's classrooms, as well as enhanced coherence through curricula frameworks and common conceptions of practice (See Smith & O'Day, 1990).

The school workplace has been central to the Center for Research on the Context of Secondary School Teaching's (CRC) multi-year research effort aimed at understanding the diverse contexts in which teachers work, and their significance for teaching and learning.[2] A distinctive feature of our research

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[2] The CRC's core research program involves three years of field work and surveys in 16 public and private secondary schools located in eight different communities in two states. The CRC sample includes diverse secondary schools--magnet schools, small public high schools, elite independent schools, alternative schools, large comprehensive high schools--located in a variety of communities--urban, suburban. Our sample schools serve quite different students. Student populations in the schools we studied range from predominately middle and upper middle class white students to "majority minority" schools that serve both

is its bottom-up, teacher's-eye perspective on teaching within particular kinds of embedded contexts. This view of teaching and the contexts within which teachers work differs from that of researchers and policy makers who look at practice from the outside-in, considering teachers and their work within established frames of policy or social science paradigms. The teachers' perspective makes all of these structures and relationships problematic, and considers teaching in terms of the daily communion of students, instruction, and dynamics of the school setting. A teacher's-eye view sees teaching as an integrating activity, intertwined and interdependent with students, subject matter, and features of the immediate workplace environment. The CRC's research, based in this different perspective, yields a strategically different conception of what matters most to teachers, of the factors that figure most prominently in their conceptions of practice, and to what transpires in the classroom.

STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS AND TEACHERS' PRACTICE

By teachers' report, students are the workplace "context" of greatest consequence.[3] Students were the basic referent as teachers talked about their schools, colleagues, classrooms, and commitment to teaching. Teachers focused on their students' academic abilities, needs and interests, attitudes and backgrounds as they explained what they do in their classrooms, how they evaluate their own effectiveness, and their sense of engagement or discouragement with teaching. (McLaughlin, Talbert & Phelan, 1990) To this point, we find that teachers discriminate their sense of professional efficacy on a <u>period by period basis</u> depending on their relationships with students in that class. Teachers' sense of efficacy is not a global trait, as it is considered in most research, but rather is constructed uniquely in terms of the differences in the characteristics of

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neighborhood youngsters and students participating in desegregation plans. The research reported here was conducted for the Center for Research on the Context of Secondary School Teaching (CRC) at Stanford University with funding from the U.S. Department of Education Office of Educational Research and Improvement (Grant # G0087C0235).

[3] Curiously, much of the school workplace literature ignores students. Exceptions are work by (Pauly, 1991; Sarason, 1990; Johnson, 1990); this research documents the ways in which relationships between teachers and their students determines classroom practices and goals for schooling. See also (Lortie, 1975) for evidence that teachers secure most satisfaction and sense of professional reward from successful associations with students.

the different classes taught by the same teacher. (Raudenbush, Rowan & Cheong, 1990)

Teachers' comments about the aspects of their students that had the greatest impact on their classroom practices focused on the cultural diversity of students in their classes, and the demands, difficulties and pressures associated with today's students. Teachers across our diverse secondary school sites accentuate the difficult world of the contemporary classrooms. Teachers see today's students burdened and distracted as never before by various family dysfunctions, peer pressures, substance abuse, pregnancies, demands of jobs or other out-of-school responsibilities and a general lack of support from family or the larger community.

Teachers in urban secondary schools also struggle to respond to high rates of student absenteeism, gang-related violence, and the needs of large numbers of immigrant children, youngsters with illegal status, or students with limited English proficiency. A registrar comments on the skyrocketing rate of student mobility in her secondary school: "When I first started as registrar (about five years ago) I had on the average of 50 kids in and out a year. Now, last year I had almost 700 students going in and out of this school. Just last week, I checked out as many kids as I checked in!"[4] A science teacher in what could be considered a typical high school commented, "It's nothing like it was ten or even five years ago. It's worse, much worse. The kids live in incredibly stressful conditions. Their self-esteem is at the bottom. The pressures on teachers are horrendous." An English teacher echoes the theme of today's students as critically different from teachers' personal and professional experience:

> ...they are facing different things than I ever had to face. I never had to face busing. I never had to face being completely uprooted, you know, and have my family leave and my mother commit suicide, and being raised by heaven knows who. I never had to face being caught up in such a bad crowd that I had to move to another state, or was unable to come to school. These are serious issues that are becoming common. And then our expectations are that kids come to school and abide by all our rules and that they function like we think they should. I mean it's really tough for these kids.

Student factors such as these, teachers say, determine the

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[4] This comment and the quotations that follow in this chapter are, unless otherwise attributed, from CRC interviews with teachers during the three years of our field research. Respondents are not identified in order to honor the confidentiality of our interviews.

attitudes, energy, competencies and motivation youngsters bring to class and have everything to do with how teachers construct instruction and consider their work. Classroom practices are forged in the up-close instructional relationships between teachers and their students (see also Pauly, 1991; Sarason, 1990). This perspective underscores the finding that teachers depend fundamentally on their students for their principal professional rewards and sense of identity (Lortie, 1975; Rosenholtz, 1985)

What has received less attention than this reciprocity between teachers and their students, however, is the substantial diversity in teachers' goals for students, diversity that reflects differences in teachers' conceptions of the teaching task, and the needs of students.

GOAL DIVERGENCE AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Teachers' goals for students are diverse and contextually specific. The 1989 CRC survey of teachers included an item on goal priorities that captured these school and teacher differences. We asked teachers to rank order each of eight general educational goals "in order of their importance for your teaching". The goals listed were: basic academic skills, good work habits, academic excellence, personal growth (self-esteem, self-discipline), human relations skills, citizenship (knowledge of institutions), specific occupational skills, moral or religious values.[5]

Teachers' responses were used to construct a goal profile for each school: average teacher ratings assigned to each of the eight goals. A comparison of these profiles for the CRC field sites yielded clusters of schools that represented five distinct goal profiles and embodies teachers' trade-offs among different, possible goals for their students:[6]

- o assimilating high schools
- o alternative high schools
- o elite academic high schools

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[5] This item replicated the 1982 Administrator and Teacher (ATS) survey which was administered to a nationally representative sample of teachers from the High School and Beyond teacher sample. Thus we are able to locate the responses of CRC respondents and schools in a national sample and to compare CRC "goal profiles" with those from the ATS sample.

[6] The U.S. school averages defined a "typical" school goal profile and served as a yardstick for the CRC analysis. See CRC, "Brief report on goal divergence among U.S. high schools: Trade-offs with academic excellence", Stanford University, February 1990.

o typical high schools
o academic high schools

Schools called assimilating high schools typically experienced significant shifts in goals associated with rapid change in the character of a school's student body.[7] For example, one school in our sample, Esperanza, in little more than two years changed from a school serving white, college-bound students to a school whose student body is 58% minority, most of whom are recent immigrants from Southeast Asia and have limited or no proficiency with English. The challenge facing faculties in assimilating high schools involved decisions about the fit or lack of fit between existing courses and their students or developing new ones suitable for this dramatically different student population.

Alterantive high schools also reflect their particular student body. One of the independent schools we studied, Greenfield, and the public alternative school in our sample, Prospect, serve students who have been unsuccessful in traditional secondary schools. The mission of these alternative schools, defined in terms of the needs of the student body for a personal environment, strong support and attention to individual needs, assigns highest priority to the goal "personal growth". These choices for them a goal profile we call "Alternative High School". Another independent school in our sample, Paloma, represents an academic elite secondary school. Paloma is at the other end of the spectrum from the alternative high schools and defines its objectives in terms of preparing its student body for admission to prestigious colleges. Its high-achieving, highly motivated student body make this school "elite" both in terms of its academic content and expectations for students.

These "mission" schools are distinguished by singular characteristics of their student bodies and thus have goal profiles that differ markedly from the "average" U. S. high school. The other schools in our sample have less dramatic or consistent stories of institutional response to the student population; their goal profiles reflect the mix of student characteristics and community expectations evident at the school. Three high schools serve an essentially "typical" student body in terms of its ethnicity, socio-economic status, skills and interests and represent the profile, typical high school.

The four high schools which fall into the "academic high school" category have a more homogenous student body in terms of student academic interests, family expectations, and socio-economic status. Thus they are able to devote more attention to

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[7] In the discussion that follows, pseudonyms are used for actual school and district identities.

"academic excellence" and less attention to "basic skills" than is the typical high school. Even within these schools, however, important diversity about goals exists at the individual teacher level. Most particularly, student (and to some extent teacher) tracking practices create substantively different student contexts and teaching challenges for teachers within the same school and department.

These divergent goal profiles, drawn by teachers with reference to the youngsters attending their classrooms, reflect teachers contextually defined conceptions of the teaching task. But, in most school settings, the daily workplace reality is even more complex than these aggregate differences suggest. These school-level goal profiles mask critical between and within-school differences among teachers' goals for similar students and in the ways in which workplace features generated dissimilar patterns of pedagogical response.

PATTERNS OF TEACHERS' PEDAGOGICAL RESPONSES

Excepting the mission schools in our sample where a pervasive and agreed-upon school charter and a relatively homogeneous student body generated goal congruence at the school-level, we saw that teachers within a secondary school can and do develop substantively different decisions about the kinds of content they will cover, how they will do it, instructional aims, and expectations for students' performance and role. These teacher responses to students comprise decisions about how to differentiate the curriculum in terms of specific classroom realities (Hemmings & Metz, 1990).

As we observed them, and learned about their practices from interviews and surveys, teachers' classroom responses to contemporary students fell into three general patterns:

- o maintain traditional standards
- o lower expectations for coverage and achievement
- o adapt practices and pedagogy.

Some teachers maintained traditional standards and continued conventional instructional practices. Nontraditional students, in large numbers, failed in these classrooms; their teachers expressed cynicism about today's youth, about teaching and frustration at their lot. An English teacher, proud of the literature curriculum she had built over the years said "I never had this much trouble teaching Julius Caesar in the past. During the past few years, it's been worse, but never this bad in terms of students' failures. I don't know if I can go on with this. I am on my way out." Commenting on the year ahead, a traditional social studies teacher in one of our assimilating secondary schools said

....I don't know what's going to happen except that they're just going to have a miserable year and fail, and I'll have a miserable year, everything's miserable. Folks just won't admit that we need to be more attentive and not put these kids in regular classes...that's not to put kids in boxes, but in all honesty, we know they can't make it. They just don't know how to pay attention, how to sit, even two or three minutes at a time. And the willingness...

Other teachers changed expectations for many of today's students, lowering standards of coverage and achievement or "dumbing down" the curriculum. Whether motivated by best intentions for their students (i.e. preserving students' self-esteem) or by disrespect for their students' motivation and ability ("I don't want to teach those kids! I don't want to be saddled with them."), both students and teachers disengaged in these classroom settings. Many teachers with whom we spoke agonized over these responses:

I will do whatever I can to get their grade up, to have them feel better about themselves...sometimes to the point that I think I am rescuing them instead of enabling them. But then if I had the kind of home life that some of these kids have, maybe I'd want a teacher to not be so rigid, you know? There's a fine line between instilling responsibility and being flexible and teaching them what they need to know to be able to negotiate.

Other teachers, believing that their students could not handle academic work, exempted themselves from having to teach it. A social studies with more than twenty five years' experience commented:

I can say with a lot of confidence (that changes in students today) has changed the idea of teaching from academic orientation to survival... And, the idea of lecturing, I hear fewer and fewer people are even trying it. It's more handout, do this, do that. Unfortunately this gets misconstrued as a laziness on the part of the teachers, but this is not the case. It is a question of pragmatism. You're doing what you can do with the clientele you have. I spend perhaps an entire semester using a book that I used to open in a sophomore class for maybe a couple or three weeks. And now it's a semester. You just can't do much more.

Students learned less in these classrooms because they were exposed to less; teachers derived few rewards from their practice. Dispirited instructional settings such as these have been called a "classroom conspiracy between alienated students

and equally disaffected teachers (and the) major source of the bad pedagogy that pervades so many of the nation's public schools, especially in bottom-track courses." (Toch, 1991:243; see also Sedlak, Wheeler, Pullin & Cusick, 1986)

Whether choosing to enforce traditional ways of doing things, or electing to lower expectations, teachers adhering to these conception of practice tended to bitterness and on-the-job-retirement. They located "the problem" of the contemporary classroom almost entirely in the student, and generally felt things would only get worse in terms of students' academic interests, accomplishments and their own professional satisfaction and sense of effectiveness. This social studies teacher's assessment is typical:

> ...it's a harder job, and you get less out of it. And that's why, that's why everyone would love to be retired. Not because they just want to sit home and watch soap operas, you know, but just so you don't have to do this anymore. It's just so hard, just so hard managing. (Teachers) would rather go to work at the (local hardware store) and manage nails. Nails are easy to manage. Teenagers in the 1990s are hard...there is so little pay off. I don't think there is one teacher in a hundred who would say (they like their job).

A third general response to the challenges of teaching in contemporary classrooms involved changed practices and framed the problem of effective instruction in today's classrooms in terms of disjunction between canonical views of content and pedagogy and the interests and character of today's students. Teachers taking this perspective developed broadened (but not lowered) definitions of achievement, new classroom arrangements (such as group work and cooperative learning) and construction of an active role for student learners. Such changes almost always are difficult, especially for veteran teachers:

> ... a lot of the stress (teachers) deal with is self-imposed, trying to deal with different kinds of problems than we have ever confronted before. I have to make some fundamental changes in what I do. For example, I never used to want to have kids work together because I was afraid all they wold do was copy. Now I see that by just talking with each other some of the minority kids are able to ascertain some of the concepts better. I have made all sorts of changes in how I run my class room. Five years ago I never would have done that. But, you know, when you see that somebody's trying to meet you half way in terms of accomplishment, where they're trying to learn what you

(are trying to teach), you know you have to make some changes...

The consequences of teachers' attempts to rethink and adapt their practices to better meet the needs of today's students differed critically. Students, most especially nontraditional students, generally prospered in these classrooms (McLaughlin, et al., 1990; Phelan, Davidson & Cao, 1991). These teachers recognized the enormous challenges of their culturally diverse student body and were highly critical of their colleagues who, in their view, insensitive to the particular needs of ethnic minority or immigrant students. For example, an angry English-as-a-second-language (ESL) teacher comments that:

> we've got a tremendous amount of work to do on insensitivity among teaches, who still flunk these kids, (who don't think they can do the work.) (School) doesn't work the same way with these kids. But many teachers don't see the inside of these students as truly intelligent, giving, you know, good kids. They think they are the baddest, the leftovers, the scum.

Outcomes for teachers who attempted to rethink their strategies in terms of the contemporary and make changes in their classroom activities varied substantially, In many settings, teachers were exhausted by their efforts and either resorted to a kind of triage, finally selecting specific students with whom they would work closely, and essentially leaving others to their own devices, Or, they left teaching altogether. For example, a weary English teacher told us:

> ...I get so frustrated. If there is a word that describes me, that's it. I've only got so much energy. I can't just go, go, go. And I just had to say "O.K., these are the ones who are going to get the attention." I just have to draw a line somewhere with regard to my work.

This exhaustion and frustration was not always a consequence of efforts to respond to today's students with new practices, however. Some teachers reported not exhaustion but exhilaration and satisfaction as a result of efforts to respond to today's students. A math teacher of 30 years tenure teaching in an assimilating high school:

> ...to be honest, I was ready to retire and was really bored with teaching until we tackled the problem of being more effective with the kids we see today. The planning, the discussions, the challenges...I am excited and turned on again. It is like a renaissance in my teaching.

Or, from a teacher in a challenging alternative high school setting:

> We all work together to meet the needs of our kids. It is exhausting, but it also is a high. How often do you get to be a hero? We know we are reaching these kids; we know we are making a difference. And it requires our own growth and change, too.

What made a difference in teachers' responses to students? Why did some teachers elect to maintain standards? to dumb-down? or revise practice? Why were some teachers burned-out and discouraged, while others were energized and hopeful? The critical point to stress here is that teachers <u>within the same school or even the same department developed different responses to similar students depending on the character of their collegial environment.</u> Which response a teacher chose was a product of his or her conception of task as framed and supported with a particular school or department community.

WORKPLACE FACTORS THAT SHAPE TEACHERS' RESPONSES TO STUDENTS

One dimension of school-level workplace that plays an important part in the responses teachers develop to their students is the extent to which teaching objectives "fit" with dominant school-level conceptions of goals for students, and the extent to which supports exist for practice as they conceive it. For example, teachers who work with the ethnic minority students transported to affluent Onyx Ridge high school as part of a desegregation effort complain of insufficient support for their efforts to address basic skills and personal growth goals within the school's controlling mission of academic achievement for the majority, college-bound student body. Teachers working with this non-traditional student population feel their efforts are neither valued nor understood at the school-level. For example:

> I think there is a tremendous reluctance to address any improvement in areas having to do with lower achieving kids or ethnic diversification. It doesn't happen here. This school is concerned with keeping a pristine reputation and don't want to address the fact that some of the kids are racist, that some of the teachers are racist, that kids (who come from the other side of the city) don't feel like they are being encouraged.

Teachers at Scholastic, an academic magnet school, whose classes are filled with minority youngsters from the neighborhood, rather than the majority students transported for purposes of racial integration from a wealthy section of the city, express similar concerns. Their students typically have limited English proficiency and many have low academic skills,

based on prior education. Goals for these students are framed in terms of basic skills development and personal development--objectives that stand in marked contrast to those of colleagues teaching advanced course and focused on the academic accomplishments of their academically talented students. Scholastic serves two very different student populations, yet academic excellence defines the magnet mission. Teachers with other objectives feel cut-off and deprived of the extra resources and assistance that poured into the school to build a strong academic program.

Teachers in such workplace environments report that general lack of support at the school level often forces them to retreat from the practices and objectives they would like to pursue for their students to activities that are less demanding in terms of their personal resources and workplace supports. These experiences caution that when teacher-student relations are forged under conditions that are alienating for teachers, few teachers will extend themselves--or will continue to do so.

In secondary schools where the student population comprises primarily those students who bring all of the challenges of today's economic, demographic, familial and community realities to the classroom, teachers' goals for students can differ significantly depending on the presence or absence of problem-solving structures at the school level. For example, Valley, one of the schools we have labeled an Assimilating High School lacks coherent or positive school-level professional community, problem-solving structures, or opportunities for rethinking practice.

Teachers at Valley High School have seen their student body change dramatically in recent years, from primarily majority, college-attending students to ethnic minority students bused across town. The absence of effective organizational supports at Valley is exacerbated by the incongruence between school's mission as remembered and the reality of most teachers' classrooms. Many teachers at Valley, upset and embittered, see the failures of their classrooms in terms of the "new" students and defend their traditional practices in terms of professional principles and standards: For example, a veteran mathematics teacher complained:

> Oh, man, you sit here and you think, how can anyone be this damn stupid. What (policymakers) have got to do is work on the kids, not (the curriculum, etc). They just keep churning and churning at the end of the material. They never churn at the end of the student...but the kid here is where the problem is today. There's nothing wrong with the curriculum. ..if I could just get people that wanted to learn, I would teach and everything would be wonderful.

This same teacher, who had both Advanced Placement and basic math courses, requested lower level classes for the upcoming academic year, so he "wouldn't have to do so much preparation for the lesser kids." He maintained "standards" with a vengeance, regularly ejecting students from his classes and awarding a preponderance of Ds and Fs. This teacher's talk, like the language of other teachers who share his view of student-as-problem, resounds with military metaphor--combat pay, front-line, "kick butt", line-of-fire--and reflects his general view of the classroom as a battlefield.

There are no effective school level structures for problem-solving or sharing information at Valley. Teachers have no way of knowing--except when individual teachers initiate a focused inquiry--about the experiences of their problem students in other classes or in other areas of school life. Teachers' personal beliefs about the needs and abilities of their students, about "best practice" or even "feasible practice" largely go unchallenged and unexamined at Valley. Even departments are only marginally supportive environments. Most of Valley's department chairs decline to hold meetings beyond the mandated semester gathering. By their own report, chairs occupy effectively symbolic, bureaucratic positions for want of effective authority or school-level leadership.

Esperanza High School provides an illuminating, strategic contrast to Valley. Esperanza, an "organizational match" of Valley in many ways, is approximately the same size, has a similar academic tradition, and faces similar challenges from today's ethnically diverse, limited English proficient student body. Like Valley's faculty, most teachers at Esperanza were teaching advanced placement and other college preparatory classes only three years ago. Unlike the demoralized Valley faculty, however, the majority of Esperanza's faculty expresses excitement about plans for new courses and engages in continuing discussion with colleagues and school administrators about how best to serve its new student body. A math teacher:

> We have a super competent faculty here, and everyone who works with us says that. And, there's a can-do sense. We can fix this problem. Let's roll up our sleeves and figure it out and go to work on it.

A paramount difference between these schools lies not in faculty talent or professionalism, but in the school-level structures set up to foster planning and problem-solving and the consequent development of a supportive school-level professional community and opportunities for reflection. Where most of Valley's faculty feel helpless and alone in the face of their changed classroom contexts, many of Esperanza's faculty feel stimulated to examine their practices and part of a collective effort to fashion effective response. Whereas many of Esperanza's

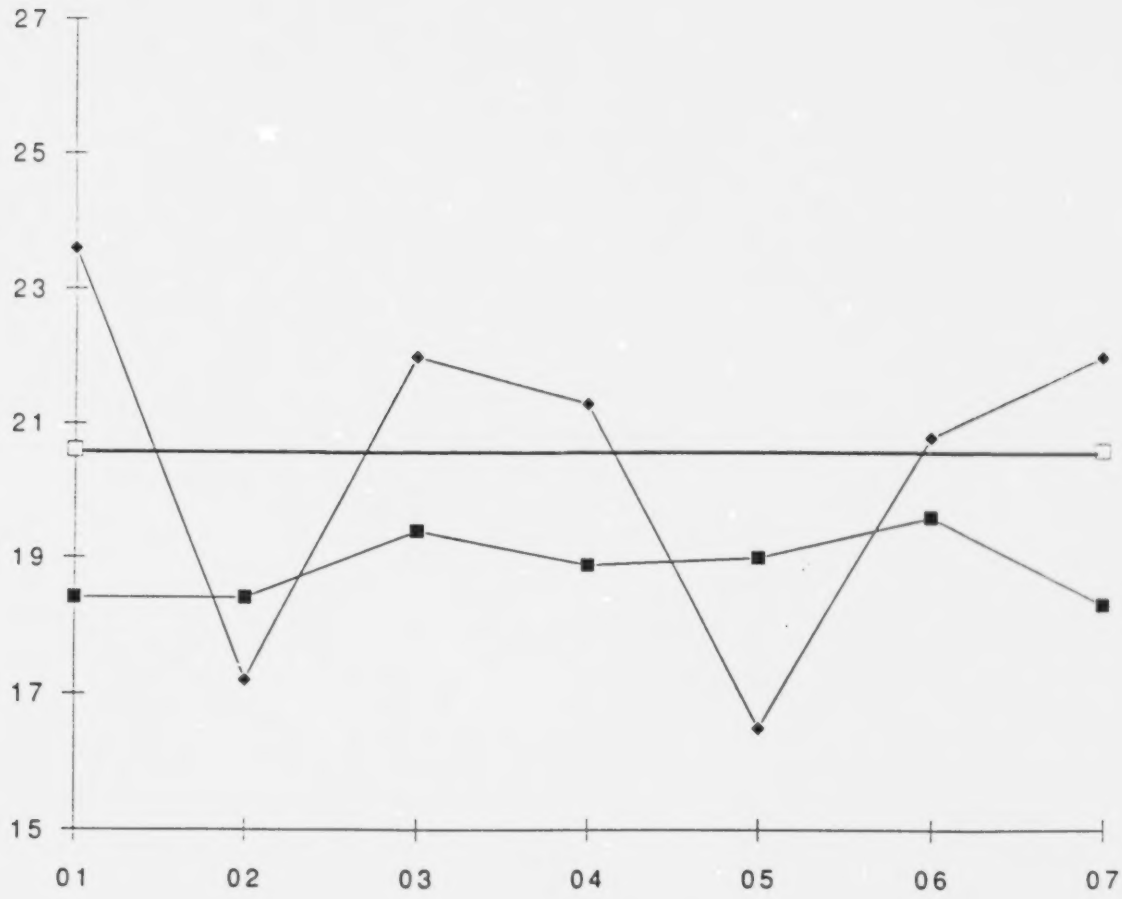
faculty recognize the need to examine and change traditional practices in light of the students they teach today, many of Valley's faculty continue entrenched routines, and cling to canonical conceptions of practice and "standards", even though they are incongruent with Valley's current student body. Valley's mission is "stuck" on old student contexts and fails to align with many teacher's classroom-based realities and needs for support. This discrepancy dampens energy for change at Valley and feeds frustration and pessimism. At Esperanza, however, explicit attention to changing school mission has energized faculty and fueled efforts to develop new practices.

Department-level differences. As significant as these school-level influences are, equally if not more powerful the influences of department and the professional community it embodies. Positive, supportive collegial relations comprise an acknowledged, important role in the Byzantine world of schools where teachers are segregated by assignment and by physical space (See Little, 1982; Grant, 1988; Lieberman, 1990; Rosenholtz, 1989 as examples). Yet, beyond breaching professional and personal isolation, we saw that the nature of collegial relations and the up-close professional community in which teachers operate played a critical role in determining the ways in which teachers thought about classroom practices. For most of the secondary schools we studied, the department was the professional community of greatest significance to teachers' norms of practice, conceptions of task, and their attitudes about teaching and students (Siskin, 1990). Further, we saw that the character of departmental professional community varied significantly within the school. For example, Figure 1 illustrates the significant differences in departmental collegiality within a high school, even though the mean collegiality score for the school is above the national average. This substantial variation means that teachers literally working across the hall from one another but in different departments experience their workplace in critically different ways. For example, teachers working in the highly collegial department 01 (shown in Figure 1) experience a workplace buzzing with daily conversations of joint projects, new materials to share, and plans for next week, next year, or tomorrow. Teachers in department 02 interact only in mandated department meetings, where they generally sit in sullen silence through the chair's announcements and pronouncements. So noncollegial is this department, faculty members have been unable to craft within a year a vision of instructional goals to guide the department's response to the new state frameworks. Within-school differences in department culture and collegiality were evident in all but the mission schools in our sample.

The character of the up-close department community--its norms of collegiality, of practice, or professionalism--has much to do with how teachers respond to students and how they construct their practice, whether they chose to maintain

A CASE EXAMPLE: CRC SITE 10

DEPARTMENT VARIATION IN COLLEGIALITY



* Subject areas are represented by codes to protect the anonymity of teachers' responses to collegiality questionnaire items. Means are plotted only for departments with ≥ 5 teacher scores.

traditional standards, adjust expectations and content, or attempt to change practices in ways what enhance students' learning and classroom role. Our 1991 survey data show that professional communities which are cohesive, highly collegial environments are also settings in which teachers report a high level of innovativeness, high levels of energy and enthusiasm, support for personal growth and learning. Teachers who belong to communities of this sort also report a high level of commitment to teaching, and to all of the students with whom they work. These features characterize department communities (such as department 01 in Figure 1) where teachers struggle collectively to examine their practices, to devise new ways of meeting students' needs, and of supporting one another in efforts to change. In other words, norms of collegiality and collaboration signals more than supportive social relationships among teachers; collegiality, our survey data show, indicates a professional community with norms of innovation and learning, where teachers are enthusiastic about their work, and where focus is upon devising strategies that enable all students to prosper.

In contrast to these collaborative communities of teacher-learners, stand settings where teachers report strong norms of privacy (and so low collegiality). In these workplace environments another sort of syndrome operates. Teachers who characterize their workplace in terms of norms of privacy also say that they see their job as routine, their workplace setting as highly bureaucraticized, and their subject matter as static, or unchanging. Teachers describing their workplace settings in these terms are less likely to innovate, to report support for learning. Teachers sketching this profile of their professional community also are more likely to lower expectations for students, especially non-traditional students, and to report low levels of commitment to teaching.

Comments about the frustrations of isolation were common in professional communities of this stripe. Teachers expressed feelings of having to "do it all themselves" with no help or support from colleagues. A discouraged, experienced social studies teacher grappling with the demands of swift change in classroom demographics observed quietly: "Here you have do to it over and over again, by yourself, and you do it every day, forever. Why did I go into teaching? I don't know; not smart, I guess."

Teachers working in these sequestered and non-collegial setting receive neither challenges to their conceptions of practice and assumptions about students, nor support for trying to do something different in response to today's students. Teachers working in this kind of professional community tend to stick with what they know, despite lack of student success or engagement, and despite their own frustration and discouragement.

These are the teachers who burn-out, who believe teaching has become an impossible job.

Departmental communities with positive norms of collegiality and high levels of innovativeness, learning and professional growth share many of the features that characterize the strong professional communities of the charter schools described earlier. Like these mission schools and their guiding objectives, departments with high levels of collegiality and support for teachers' growth had an express conception of what the department was about, a vision. A vital English department drew energy and focus from a collective concern for writing and the collaboration it engendered. A mathematics department with strong norms of collegiality and innovation established express goals of devising new strategies to work more effectively with the immigrant and non-traditional students who were filling their classes. The energy of critical examination and development invigorated the department and led not only to changed practices but to changed norms of faculty relations. A science department adopted a similar focus and worked as a group to examine their practices in light of the motivations, abilities, interests and needs of the students in their science classes today.

A word of caution is in order, however. Strong professional communities, by themselves, are not always a good thing. Shared beliefs can support shared delusions about the merit or function of instructional orthodoxies or entrenched routines. This collective agreement can generate rigidity about practice and a "one best way" mentality that resists change or serious reflection. Capacity for reflection, feedback and problem-solving was essential to communities of professionals endeavoring to respond effectively to today's students and to the mission schools in our sample.

Supporting collective efforts to address a shared objective in both the mission schools and collegial department environments were explicit problem-solving structures and norms. Within the mission schools, particularly the alternative schools, commitment to on-going problem-solving and examination of practice was fundamental to the success of the enterprise. Problem-solving at Greenfield and Prospect involves intense, time-consuming deliberation about the nature of a child's difficulties and effective responses available to the school. Greenfield's faculty meetings illustrate collective problem-solving and responsibility of the highest order; they support faculty efforts to "turn around" difficult students by providing information and by framing "the problem" in terms of the responsibility of the whole rather than of individual faculty members.

While Greenfield's extensive and intensive investment in problem solving and collective responsibility reflects the reality and special mission of the school, the basic elements of

this strategy are evident in strong collegial department environments. An especially cohesive, dynamic and innovative English department meets every day at lunch to discuss practice, share ideas and materials. A social studies department characterized by extraordinary collegial spirit and innovative practice meets once a week to review events, exchange classroom stories, or even present sample lessons. A science department blessed with a central space has established norms of on-going problem-solving and discussion of practice, abetted by frequent visits to each other's classes as observers or participants.

The professional communities created in these departments and in the mission schools also were characterized by a sense of fair play and democratic decision making. For example, "teacher tracking" was either eliminated or avoided if possible in these highly collegial departments. Advanced Placement courses were not the entitled domain of senior faculty, while newer teachers were assigned to the basic courses. All teachers taught all levels of content in most of these departments; all teachers had a say in which courses they would prefer to teach.

When teacher-election failed to result in course coverage, most department chairs in such collegial settings consulted the group rather than simply assigning the unwanted courses. A social studies chair comments on the many benefits of this policy for both faculty and students:

> I invited the department to analyze the situation in which the majority of the teachers indicated they would "kill" to avoid freshman social studies and suggest a solution. The response was to make the freshman course the top department priority, involve the strongest teachers in an augmented planning team for the upcoming year, and to recruit student teachers to bring added enthusiasm to the program. The department, in essence, decided to construct an outstanding curriculum so that most members would want to teach it in the future. Democratic decision-making turned a potential disaster into a new opportunity for collaborative growth. (Hill & Bushey, 1992:10-11)

All of these settings exhibiting high levels of collegiality and norms of professional growth made critical reflection a norm, and made developing effective instructional practices for all students the top priority. Within these collegial environments, instructional practices that were ineffective for students or demoralizing for faculty were not allowed to stand. This strategy made critical review and construction of practice a necessity; adaptation to students was a by-product of this constant revision of practice in the context of a broader instructional mission. The professional community provided opportunity for content and student specific mirrors of practice, letting the workplace be a

teacher, and enabling teachers to be learners. All of these departmental communities established norms of collective responsibility--of mutual support and mutual obligation--for practice and for student outcomes.

These strong communities also created scale, environments in which human relationships could be formed and nurtured, settings in which information about students serves as a resource to practice. And with scale and the personal knowledge it assumed, came fewer rules and regulations defining roles and responsibilities. Teachers working in these settings located the sources of their professional control and decisionmaking in their community, not in supposed bureaucratic routines or disciplinary orthodoxies, as did teachers functioning in workplace settings characterized by strong norms of privacy and individual isolation. The significant within-school and within-department variation in the extent to which teaching jobs are perceived as routine, and the environment viewed as bureaucraticized suggest that the function of rules or management controls are in the eye of the beholder. Not surprisingly, isolated teachers with no resources to support adaptation or change, or to take effective control of their practice, not surprisingly blame organizational routines--structures beyond their control--as significant constraints on practice.

Departments and schools characterized by professional community of this sort--discourse communities, learning communities--instilled and enabled teacher autonomy of the most fundamental and meaningful variety, control posited in the up-close workplace and collegial context, in attitudes of "we can do it" and collective expertise. Teachers in such settings do not cede their authority to rules, unexamined conventions, or the challenges brought to the classroom by today's students. Strong professional community establishes "locus of control" in the profession and locates capacity to initiate action located in problem-solving routines and norms of reflective practice. To this point, almost every teacher we encountered who was pursuing notions of alternative practices for his or her classroom on a sustained basis, who felt excited about workplace challenges and engaged in issues of practice and pedagogy, who expressed energy and continued enthusiasm for the profession was a member of a strong collegial community, a community of learners. And, every teacher we encountered who was engaged in the active, demanding form of pedagogy called "teaching for understanding", where students and teachers construct knowledge together, belonged to such a community (See Cohen, McLaughlin & Talbert, forthcoming for elaboration of what teaching for understanding is and the settings that enable it). Not one teacher who had evolved this form of pedagogy and conception of classrooms was an isolate.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

Teachers construct different goals for their students, objectives that reflect conceptions of practice rooted not in the latest entry in the education fashion parade, or even in state or district policy pronouncements, but in teachers' decisions about how to respond to the students in their classrooms. Teachers are brokers, constructing educational arrangements that acknowledge the goals of society, characteristics of the students with whom they work, their professional judgment, and the character of the workplace context (Hemmings, et al., 1990).

Not all teachers respond in the same ways to similar students, and not all teachers' responses lead to positive outcomes for either themselves or their students. Teachers' classroom choices are a product of their conceptions of subject matter (fixed or malleable?) and their conceptions of their students as learners (motivated? academically able? proficient?). These relationships between teachers, students and subject matter are the "stuff" of schooling. The way in which this stuff plays out in particular classrooms or school environment depends most of all not on factors popular with policy makers, but on the character of the up-close professional community to which teachers belong.

Classroom practices and conceptions of teaching are not predetermined or invariate but emerge through a dynamic process of social definition and strategic interaction among teachers, students and subject matter in the context of a school or department community. The character of the professional community which exists in a school or department--collegial or isolating; risk-taking or rigidly invested in "best practices"; problem-solving or problem-hiding--plays a major role in how teachers see their work and their students, and why some teachers opt out, figuratively or literally, while many teachers persist and thrive even in exceedingly challenging teaching contexts.[8]

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[8] Jennifer Nias develops this important point in Primary teachers talking: A study of teaching as work. (London: Routledge, 1989.) To this point, no faculty in our sample of secondary schools works with a more difficult student body than does the Greenfield faculty. Yet, on our 1989 survey, that faculty's rating of professional satisfaction was the highest in our sample of schools. The faculty explains this response in terms of their school community--the ability to draw upon the strength of the whole to make a difference and freedom to act upon their professional judgment--and expectations that they can make a positive difference in the lives of their students.

Effective responses to the challenges of contemporary classrooms require a spirited, reflective professional community of teachers, a workplace setting in which to examine assumptions about practice, focus collective expertise on solutions based in classroom realities, support efforts to change and grow professionally. Strong professional communities allow expression of new ideas and innovations in terms of specific curricula and student characteristics. Energetic professional communities at the school or department levels actually generate motivation to "roll up our sleeves" and endeavor to meet the unfamiliar and often difficult needs of contemporary students.

Strong professional communities of this stripe are essential to changing norms of practice and pedagogy, especially for veteran teachers, in ways that benefit both students and teachers. Inadequate workplace stimulation reinforces teachers' propensity to "plateau" or continue with stale practices. The embittered, frustrated teachers who spoke in these pages here all existed in professional communities with powerful norms of privacy, and unchallenged "sacred principles" or personal beliefs. Lack of contact with others holding different views, or struggling with similar problems, deprived these teachers of critical feedback about their practices and beliefs, as well as exposure to possible responses or alternative practices for contemporary classrooms. Teachers' collective experience comprises a rich pool from which new practices or changed conceptions can be fashioned. Classroom challenges beyond the reach of an individual teacher may yield to collective reflection and development.

And, for professional communities themselves, what made the difference between communities rigidly vested in "one right way" or in unexamined orthodoxies, and communities which could play this teaching function was the existence of norms of on-going technical inquiry, reflection, and professional growth.

The school workplace is a physical setting, a formal organization, an employer. It also is a social and psychological setting in which teachers construct a sense of practice, of professional efficacy, and of professional community. This aspect of the workplace, the nature of the professional community that exists there, appears more critical than any other factor to the character of teaching and learning for teachers and for their students.

This conclusion suggests that the metaphors of the school workplace that motivate policy and frame research on schools and teaching may misdirect rather than enlighten (Talbert & McLaughlin, forthcoming). Metaphors of schools as formal organization direct attention to incentives, management structures, oversight and accountability, governance, technology and material aspects of the workplace. Shifting to focus on

school workplace through a metaphor of community highlight strategically different aspects of the school environment and fundamentally different levers for policy and topics for research. Community metaphor draws attention to norms and beliefs of practice, collegial relations, shared goals, occasion for collaboration, problems of mutual support and mutual obligation. Metaphors of community draw policy attention to conditions in the school context that enable community, that stimulate the up-close professional contexts that support and stimulate reflective practice.

Moving from metaphors of formal organization to metaphors of community directs research to examine questions of transforming and supporting vital professional community. How do strong professional communities come about at the school level? Within schools? How can professional communities be transformed from cultures dominated by norms of privacy and rigid orthodoxies to settings which value sharing, reflection, criticism and invention? How can communities be formed in which student success is considered a collective responsibility, rather than an individual teacher's challenge? The research reported here suggests the metaphors which dominate presently illuminate less important aspects of the school workplace and relegate to shadows what matters most to teachers and teaching--the character of the workplace as professional community.

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